

the  
best  
of  
bardot





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# the best of bardot

Sixties fashion designers and songwriters had at least one point in common: their desire for Brigitte Bardot. Obviously, the craving was not exclusive to these two groups, everyone longed for Bardot. Men from Dunkirk to Bombay lusted after her, women from London to Tokyo dreamed of being more like her, newspapers coveted her finest poses and filmmakers (following Godard's example) yearned to caress her body's entrancing curves with a slow, metaphysical sweep of their lens. Even that prim old lady the French Republic finally yielded to temptation and adopted her as its icon. However, the fashion designers and songwriters shared a single goal: to tailor their wares to a global anatomic bomb, the first with fabrics, the second with notes, two related crafts.

Writing for Brigitte or clothing Bardot implied satisfying a seasonal demand for auditory and visual pleasure. But it also meant taking on less ephemeral challenges: capturing a facet of the growing legend in a thighboot or chorus, the flow of a dress over divine hips or the flow of a melody from those dizzying lips. So were Courrèges and Paco Rabane mirror images of Claude Bolling and Gainsbourg? Beginning with the torrid mambo in "And God Created Woman" (memorable for its trance-inducing beat and the scantiness it revealed in BB's dress), for Bardot – or her legendary image – music was essentially a spillway for erotic overflow.

Gainsbourg, the artist who would literally have her climax on tape, understood this better than anyone. Bardot was singing long before her career in song began in 1962. Right from her film début, she was already singing: her body sang, her figure sang, her hair sang, her diction sang... Once she decided to devote her alternately sulky and teasing voice to light music, she enjoyed the luxury of having nothing to prove: she had already been bewitching the public imagination for many seasons. When Bardot turned to music in the year when the Beatles exploded onto the world scene, it was at first a mere formality. But then as the idol's acting career and private life grew increasingly hard to reconcile, it became her favourite recreational activity. Every second of 1968's legendary Brigitte Bardot Show – the summit of her singing career filmed by François Reichenbach and Eddy Mathalon – reeks of the almost childish pleasure she took in dancing, dressing up and singing.

We have mentioned great fashion designers, but the writers who catered to Bardot's voice were not all as great. Along with a handful of true artists, droves of off-the-peg-tune merchants flocked around her, sometimes winning her favours. It is for this reason that her sixties discography of barely a few dozen songs has the chaotic air of a radio programme, stringing together fine pearls and cheap imitations, scintillating gems and tawdry kitsch. This extremely selective compilation is virtually a jewellery box. It picks and chooses among the different sides recorded by Brigitte for Philips, AZ and Barclay between 1962 and 1970. Those eight enchanted years are all here, set between brackets penned by Serge Gainsbourg. At one end is his "L'appareil à sous" (The slot machine), an episodic twist typical of the songs fashioned by the sophisticated, slightly cynical poisoner of the budding pop generation. At the other is "Je t'aime... moi non plus", music's most famous example of coitus interruptus (fearing a very comprehensible fit of conjugal jealousy, Bardot refused to allow it to be released). As we know, this steamy vocal coupling (a massive hit in its 1969 Jane Birkin incarnation) was only revealed almost twenty years later.





More of these role-playing or physical games in partnership with Gainsbourg, her lover in '67 and '68, and powered by Michel Colombier's supersonic production are featured here: "Harley Davidson", "Bonnie and Clyde", "Contact"... Bardot seems to have fired Gainsbourg's genius more than any of the mentor's other muses, certainly because their relationship had the same goal outside the studio: to embody a perfect fusion, the glamorous ideal of the pop world, a moment of grace inevitably destined to fade as quickly as it had come into being... and remain in our collective memory always. While Gainsbourg deserves his standing as France's virtually-unchallenged supreme creator in the sixties, he especially owes it to his tremendous gift for combining new trends with technological progress in the recording studio. Each of the songs he fashioned for BB includes a measure of incongruity mixed with lashings of charm, a zest of the avant-garde in a sea of melodic, entertaining unguent. More than any other, Bardot exemplified the dream character from a "Comic Strip" styled by a Jean-Claude Forest or Guy Peelaert, and the Gainsbourg songs she inspired almost all revolve around this idea of a fantasised heroine: part Amazon in a modern chrome-and-leather cavalry, part Venusian android... half SM, half SF.

Before or after Gainsbourg, other songwriting figures would settle for an espousal of the two-dimensional cinematic image that Bardot had already sublimated then eroded with excessive redundancy: the girl of wind and sun, her blondness vaguely supernatural, able to convey every type of feeling and state – from sadness to elation and true love to brutal passion – with a relatively narrow range of expressions.

In the 19 songs on this anthology, we see her as she always appeared: irresistible and fiery, ingenuous (in the sun) and immodest, first embracing then escaping her canonical woman-child persona forged in the flames. Lyricist Gérard Bourgeois and tunesmith Jean-Max Rivière, recurring partners in this decade of song, would (unlike Gainsbourg) hit on the right balance each time, enabling young women of BB's age to identify with her as closely as possible.



Set with ornaments whose subtlety rivals Polnareff's finest efforts, the splendid, touching "Je reviendrai toujours vers toi" (I'll always come back to you) is a perfect expression of their skill. However, BB did not have such a "virginal" image as Françoise Hardy or France Gall, new faces at the time, and the whiff of scandal that preceded each of her moves reacted with the spuriously candid complicity of the songs, far too innocent to be true. When sociologist Gloria Lasso, mistress of elegant repartee, stepped in, the lyrics of "Ciel de lit" (Above the bed) were suddenly more explicit and better matched.

Throughout these years of exuberance and sparkle, a few figures in the background helped to create the musical formulae that still give these songs their edge today. Apart from Claude Bolling in the early years, the pyrotechnic prowess of Alain Goraguer in particularly explosive songs such as the diabolically orchestrated "Ça pourrait changer" (That could change) is especially noteworthy. Turning to imported, exotic flavours – Argentinian and Brazilian in this instance: *Invitango*, *Maria Ninguem*, *Tu veux ou tu veux pas* (Do you want to or not?) – here again, the French arrangers of the day had to muster all their subtlety and skill to make these grafts work. But if we had to choose the two songs that have ultimately stuck to BB like a perpetual suntan, we would obviously have to go for "La Madrague" and "Le soleil" (The sun), both written by Bourgeois and Rivière in the space of a few years. Or perhaps the subsequent "Nue au soleil" (Naked in the sun). Naturalist, naturist songs in their barest instrumental form, spilling from Brigitte's lips in the most blissful, serene tones imaginable. It is to the clichéd image of this musical souvenir that our memories stubbornly cling.

Christophe Conte

1. L'appareil à sous 1:26  
(S. Gainsbourg) © 1963 Mercury - Warner Chappell Music Publ. / Melody Nelson Publ.
2. La Madrague 2:35  
(J.M. Rivière / G. Bourgeois) © 1963 Mercury - Warner Chappel Music Publ.
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(J.M. Rivière / G. Bourgeois) © 1964 Mercury - Ed. Odette Gras
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13. Harley Davidson 2:30  
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14. Contact 2:18  
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(J.M. Rivière - G. Bourgeois) arrgts : P. Piot © 1968 Mercury  
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3. Moi je joue 1:43 Ed. Odette Gras

4. Invitango 2:32 BMG Publ.

5. Ça pourrait changer 1:44  
Emi Publ./Hunter Music

6. Ne me laisse pas l'aimer 1:46 Ed. Semi

7. Maria Ninguém 2:35 Ed. Semi

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Ed. Sidonie/Melody Nelson Publ.

9. Ciel de lit 1:41  
Warner Chappell Music Publ.

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Ed. Sidonie/Melody Nelson Publ.

11. Bubble Gum 1:45 Ed. Sidonie

12. Le soleil 3:14  
Warner Chappell Music Publ.

13. Harley Davidson 2:30  
Ed. Sidonie/Melody Nelson Publ.

14. Contact 2:18  
Warner Chappell Music Publ./Melody Nelson Publ.

15. Oh ! qu'il est vilain 2:30  
Warner Chappell Music Publ./Tilt/Semi

16. Le diable est anglais 2:34  
Warner Chappell Music Publ.

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